



**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**Washington DC 20420**

March 2004

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

It is with pleasure that the VR&E Task Force presents its report, *The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Veteran*.

Based on your leadership and direction, we conducted an unvarnished, top-to-bottom independent examination, evaluation, and analysis of the VR&E Program. You challenged us to make recommendations that will provide veterans with service-connected disabilities – especially those who have sustained injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan – the opportunities and services that can enable them to obtain and maintain suitable employment.

Many critiques have been written about the VR&E Program. In all candor, the Task Force found little evidence that VR&E efforts to obtain jobs for rehabilitated veterans have been as successful as Congress intended. While specific statistical information is lacking to assess the impact on the individual veteran, we know that many veterans do not achieve their rehabilitation goals. The program name has changed several times, but the emphasis and direction continues to be education over a long period of rehabilitation.

The Task Force contends that the time for change has arrived and consequently recommends a new paradigm for vocational rehabilitation and employment: a comprehensive, integrated service delivery system that serves disabled veterans from their military service through discharge, counseling, and transition to employment. Our proposed delivery system is aligned with modern vocational rehabilitation practices that focus on veterans' abilities, not their disabilities, an approach that promotes equal opportunity and access to the mainstream of American life.

We are confident that our recommendations can rebuild the existing program into a proactive, employment-driven 21<sup>st</sup> Century program that can effectively serve veterans with disabilities. Timely implementation will require a strategic vision, organizational leadership, appropriate resources, and most important, the support of VR&E employees. Moreover, success will be predicated on a new way of thinking about the Department's responsibility to the disabled veteran with an employment handicap.

The Task Force wishes to thank all those who assisted our deliberations, in particular the staff of the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service. We appreciate the opportunity to have been of service to you, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and our Nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dorcas R. Hardy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dorcas" being the most prominent part.

Dorcas R. Hardy  
Task Force Chairman

Department of Veterans Affairs  
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Task Force

Report to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs



Honorable Dorcas R. Hardy  
Task Force Chairman



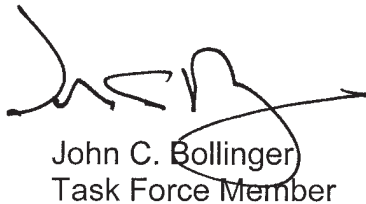
Ronald W. Drach  
Task Force Member



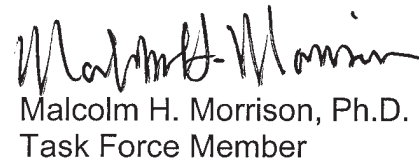
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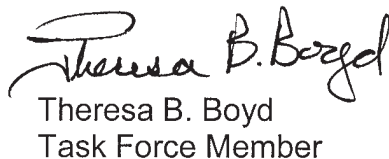
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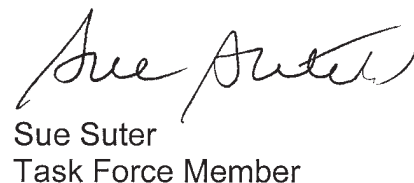
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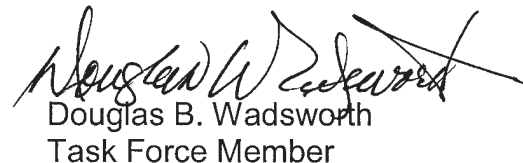
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